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MEXICO CITY —
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Fernando Bustos Gorozpe was sitting with friends in a cafe here when he realized that — once again — they were outnumbered.

“We’re the only brown people,” said Bustos, a 38-year-old writer and university professor. “We’re the only people speaking Spanish except the waiters.”

Mexico has long been the top foreign travel destination for Americans, its bountiful beaches and picturesque pueblos luring tens of millions of U.S. visitors annually. But in recent years, a growing number of tourists and remote workers — hailing from Brooklyn, [N.Y., Silicon Valley](#) and points in between — have flooded the nation’s capital and left a scent of new-wave imperialism.

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The influx, which has accelerated since the onset of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#) and is likely to continue as inflation rises, is transforming some of the city’s most treasured neighborhoods into expat enclaves.

In leafy, walkable quarters such as Roma, Condesa, Centro and Juarez, rents are soaring as Americans and other foreigners snap up houses and landlords trade long-term renters for travelers willing to pay more on Airbnb. Taquerias, corner stores and *fondas* — small, family-run lunch spots — are being replaced by Pilates studios, co-working spaces and sleek cafes advertising oat-milk lattes and avocado toast.

And English — well, it's everywhere: ringing out at supermarkets, natural wine bars and fitness classes in the park.

At Lardo, a Mediterranean restaurant where, on any given night, three-quarters of the tables are filled with foreigners, a Mexican man in a well-cut suit recently took a seat at the bar, gazed at the English-language menu before him and sighed as he handed it back: "A menu in Spanish, please."

Some *chilangos*, as locals are known, are fed up.

Recently, expletive-laced posters appeared around town.

"New to the city? Working remotely?" they read in English. "You're a f—ing plague and the locals f—ing hate you. Leave."

That sentiment echoed the hundreds of responses that poured in after a young American posted this seemingly innocuous tweet: "Do yourself a favor and remote work in Mexico City — it is truly magical."

"Please don't," read one of the kinder replies. "This city is becoming more and more expensive every day in part because of people like you, and you don't even realize or care about it."

Hugo Van der Merwe, 31 — a video game designer who grew up in Florida and Namibia and has spent the last several months working remotely from Mexico City, Montreal and Bogota, Colombia — said he understands why locals are vexed by the growing population of "digital nomads."

Clear financial incentives are drawing Americans to Mexico City — where the average local salary is \$450 a month.

But there is friction beneath the surface, as more locals consider what gentrification means for the city's economics, culture and even race relations.

Over the weekend, a tenant advocacy group hosted a walking tour of "places we have lost to gentrification, touristification and forced displacement."

“Our homes,” the event flier read, “now house digital nomads.”

After his revelation at the cafe, Bustos uploaded a video to his popular TikTok account, complaining that the influx of foreigners in Mexico City “stinks of modern colonialism.” Nearly 2,000 people posted comments in agreement.

His critique is multilayered and speaks to generations of injustices. There’s the problem of newcomers’ “indifference as to how their actions are affecting locals,” he said, but also the fact that Mexicans cannot migrate to the U.S. with the same ease. He also believes that Americans, many of whom are white, are reinforcing the city’s pervasive — if infrequently discussed — caste system.

Indigenous Mexicans are more likely to be poor than lighter-skinned Mexicans and are largely unrepresented in film, television and advertisements. A growing social movement called Poder Prieto (“Brown Power”) has demanded that Netflix, HBO and other streaming platforms [feature dark-skinned actors](#).

“Mexico is classist and racist,” Bustos said. “People with white skin are given preference. Now, if a local wants to go to a restaurant or a club, they don’t just have to compete with rich, white Mexicans but with foreigners too.”

Greater Mexico City’s 3,000 square miles are ringed by mountains and home to 21 million people. Most Americans stick to a few neighborhoods in the center, some of which were first gentrified by Mexicans.

“We’re just seeing Americans flooding in,” Alexandra Demou said. “It’s people who maybe have their own business, or maybe they’re thinking of starting some consulting or freelance work. They don’t even know how long they’re going to stay. They’re completely picking up their entire lives and just moving down here.”

Omar Euroza, a barista at a coffee shop in Roma, said rent for his apartment in the city’s historic center, another place where foreigners are flocking, has more than doubled over the last five years. Nearby, renters have been pushed out as entire buildings are turned into upscale apartments. Euroza said he was sick of feeling like an outsider in his city. Around 60%-70% of his clients are foreigners, he said.

“Some people order in English and get mad when I don’t understand them. That’s unfair. If we go to the U.S., we’re expected to speak English.”

He has been struck by the number of remote workers flooding in and worries that they are different. The nature of their jobs means they don’t necessarily have to learn Spanish nor integrate into Mexican society, he said. It allows a certain aloofness that wasn’t possible a few years ago.